

# Emotional Eating



- 54% percent of American adults aim to finish everything on their plates.
- More than 2/3 of overweight adults report that they eat when stressed.
- One study reports that up to 80% of women do not listen to physical hunger cues all the time. Instead, they are concerned about dieting, losing weight, and avoiding "bad foods".
- 38% of adults overeat to the point of feeling uncomfortable at least once a week. Of these, 20% compensate by restricting food intake later on.
- Experts estimate that 75% of overeating is caused by emotions.

## **Why do you eat food?**

- Hunger/energy needs
- Stress
- Boredom
- Social gatherings/entertainment
- Comfort
- It's sitting in front of you calling your name
- Reward or celebration

## **Why do you need food?**

Energy – food is our body's fuel!

## **How to tell the difference?**

There are several differences between emotional hunger and physical hunger, according to the University of Texas Counseling and Mental Health Center:

1. Emotional hunger comes on suddenly; physical hunger occurs gradually.
2. When you are eating to fill a void that isn't related to an empty stomach, you crave a specific food, such as pizza or ice cream, and only that food will meet your need. When you eat because you are actually hungry, you're open to options.
3. Emotional hunger feels like it needs to be satisfied instantly with the food you crave; physical hunger can wait.
4. Even when you are full, if you're eating to satisfy an emotional need, you're more likely to keep eating. When you're eating because you're hungry, you're more likely to stop when you're full.
5. Emotional eating can leave behind feelings of guilt; eating when you are physically hungry does not.

## **Comfort Foods**

When emotional hunger rumbles, one of its distinguishing characteristics is that you're focused on a particular food, which is likely a comfort food.

"Comfort foods are foods a person eats to obtain or maintain a feeling," says Brian Wansink, PhD, director of the Food and Brand Lab at the University of Illinois.

"Comfort foods are often wrongly associated with negative moods, and indeed, people often consume them when they're down or depressed, but interestingly enough, comfort foods are also consumed to maintain good moods."

"The types of comfort foods a person is drawn toward varies depending on their mood. People in happy moods tended to prefer ... foods such as pizza or steak (32%). Sad people reached for ice cream and cookies 39% of the time, and 36% of bored people opened up a bag of potato chips."

# 7 Steps to Regain Control

## 1. Learn to Recognize True Hunger

Using the scale below, learn how to recognize hunger and satiety. Before you begin each meal, record how you feel based on the scale below. Then, pause during the middle of your meal and record again how you feel. Do this again after you have finished your meal.

- 10= Stuffed to the point of feeling sick
- 9= Very uncomfortably full, need to loosen your belt
- 8= Uncomfortably full, feel stuffed
- 7= Very full, feel as if you have overeaten
- 6= Comfortably full, satisfied
- 5= Comfortable, neither hungry nor full
- 4= Beginning signals of hunger
- 3= Hungry, ready to eat
- 2= Very hungry, unable to concentrate
- 1= Starving, dizzy, irritable

## 2. Know Your Triggers

Situations and emotions that trigger us to eat fall into five main categories.

- Social. Eating when around other people. For example, excessive eating can result from being encouraged by others to eat; eating to fit in; arguing; or feelings of inadequacy around other people.
- Emotional. Eating in response to boredom, stress, fatigue, tension, depression, anger, anxiety, or loneliness as a way to "fill the void."
- Situational. Eating because the opportunity is there. For example, at a restaurant, seeing an advertisement for a particular food, passing by a bakery. Eating may also be associated with certain activities such as watching TV, going to the movies or a sporting event, etc.
- Thoughts. Eating as a result of negative self-worth or making excuses for eating. For example, scolding oneself for looks or a lack of will power.
- Physiological. Eating in response to physical cues. For example, increased hunger due to skipping meals or eating to cure headaches or other pain.

### **3. Look Elsewhere for Comfort**

- Drink a big glass of water.
- Read a good book or magazine or listen to music.
- Go for a walk or jog.
- Take a bubble bath.
- Do deep breathing exercises.
- Play cards or a board game.
- Talk to a friend.
- Do housework, laundry, or yard work.
- Wash the car.
- Write a letter.
- Or do any other pleasurable or necessary activity until the urge to eat passes.
- Do whatever works for you!

### **4. Don't Keep Unhealthy Foods Around**

Avoid having an abundance of high-calorie comfort foods in the house so you're not as tempted to eat it. If you feel hungry or blue, postpone the shopping trip for a few hours so that these feelings don't influence your decisions at the store.

### **5. Snack Healthy**

If you feel the urge to eat between meals, choose a low-fat, low-calorie food, such as fresh fruit, vegetables with fat-free dip, yogurt or unbuttered popcorn. Or test low-fat, lower calorie versions of your favorite foods to see if they satisfy your craving. Try a 1 oz. piece of dark chocolate instead of a whole candy bar.

### **6. Eat a Balanced Diet**

- If you're not getting enough calories to meet your energy needs, you may be more likely to give in to emotional eating.
- Try to eat at fairly regular times and don't skip breakfast.
- Eat more fiber

### **7. Exercise Regularly and Get Adequate Sleep**

Your mood is more manageable and your body can more effectively fight stress when it's fit and well rested. U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services suggests that:

"Adults gain substantial health benefits from 2 ½ hours a week of moderate aerobic physical activity" (brisk walking, water aerobics, ballroom dance, jogging, jumping rope).

"Adults should do muscle-strengthening activities, such as weight training, push-ups, sit-ups, carry heavy loads and heavy gardening, at least two days a week."

## Listening to Hunger Cues

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	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast							
Snack							
Lunch							
Snack							
Dinner							
Snack							